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PAPERS PRESENTED
AT
THE 14th and 15th ANNUAL MEETINGS
OF
THE CHARLES WESLEY SOCIETY
August 14–16, 2003
Xavier Center
Convent Station, New Jersey
and
September 30–October 2, 2004
Wesleyan Center for 21st Century Studies
Point Loma Nazarene University
San Diego, California

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2003

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Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society 2003 and 2004

Published in the United States by

The Charles Wesley Society

Editor, S T Kimbrough, Jr.

Assistant Editor, Charles A. Green

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Charles Wesley on Worship

Karen B. Westerfield Tucker

When Methodists, Wesleyans, and Anglicans around the world gather for worship on any given Sunday, hymn texts by Charles Wesley will undoubtedly be heard within this global offering of praise. Can we imagine an English-speaking Christmas without “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” or an Easter without “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”? And the favorite “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” itself has been translated into many languages. The poetry of Charles Wesley has aided the worship and devotions of millions over the generations and has shaped their theological and spiritual reflection.

But what has Charles Wesley to say about the subject of worship itself? Neither Charles nor his brother John wrote a sustained discourse on the general topic of Christian worship, though both in their own way produced influential liturgical texts. Charles, of course, wrote the vast majority of the hymns the brothers published. John brought out collections of devotional prayers for the days of the week, for families, and for children as well as a revision of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer that still guides the way some Methodists pray on Sunday mornings. Both brothers, in addressing a significant concern about liturgical praxis, also wrote their own statements urging the necessity of frequent—at least weekly—reception of the Lord’s Supper.¹ John wrote a pair of important sermons on “Spiritual Worship” and “Spiritual Idolatry.” Yet a systematic discussion of worship is not found in the writings of either man, probably because for both brothers worship was understood to be knit in with the whole fabric of the Christian life as a key component of Christian anthropology and soteriology. Comments about the import of worship and its practice are thus appropriately interwoven with broader theological discussions in each brother’s sermons and treatises.

So to expose Charles’s understanding of Christian worship, it is necessary to examine the range of his literary output: the poetry, where in some cases he gives a heading to the text which signals its liturgical relevance; and the prose, including the public sermons and treatises and the more private letters and journal. Sadly, much of Charles’s work has yet to appear in critical edition or even in print, though soon that lacuna will be filled. For this reason, what is offered here must be understood to be a preliminary investigation to be filled out later by evidence not yet available. Even with such limitations of accessible material, the dangers of gleaning from such a vast literary field are many: the creation of a false impression of systematic reflection, the distortion of context, and the blurring of what may be an evolution of thought. Nevertheless, a reading of Charles’s

¹ See John Wesley’s sermon on “The Duty of Constant Communion” and Charles Wesley’s sermon/treatise on Acts 20:7 (Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 280–286). Other citations of sermons by Charles Wesley come from Newport’s edition, hereafter cited as *Sermons*.

writings shows that what he offers throughout his lifetime is an evangelical and nuanced but classical Anglican interpretation of worship, grounded in the historic texts approved by the Church of England, including what is set out in the standard Books of Homilies, what Charles in one place described as “the noblest compositions now upon earth, excepting only the inspired writings.”² Keeping with the foundational teachings of his church, Charles takes on the liturgical controversies of his day, among them an increasing openness to Arian and Unitarian claims, liturgical apathy and indifferentism, and the “pharisaical” observance of religious forms without evident spiritual interiorization. In his critique of these practices, and in his apologia for the praxis of apostolic Christianity, we find Charles’s theology of Christian worship.

I. Worship is granted by and given to the three-one God

At the heart of Charles’s theology is the God affirmed in the classical ecumenical creeds that would have been rehearsed in morning and evening prayer and at the Eucharist: the God revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Against those who would, in his estimation, “madly threaten to dethrone the Filial Deity” by making the Son less than equal to the Father,³ Charles avowed a “coequal, coeternal Three”⁴ who together work to redeem a sinful humanity:

All hail mysterious Trinity!
 Every person of the Three
 In my salvation meets:
 The Father draws me to the Son,
 Accepts for Jesus’ sake alone,
 And all my sins forgets.

The Son his cleansing blood applies,
 Breaks my heart, and bids me rise
 A penitent forgiven:
 The Holy Ghost his witness bears,
 Numbers me with the royal heirs,
 And gives a taste of heaven.

These three then together enable the human creature to render fit praise and thanksgiving:

² Sermon on Romans 3:23–24, *Sermons*, 171. Many of the worship “themes” Charles addresses are contained in the Second Book of Homilies, particularly “On the Right Use of the Church,” “Against Peril of Idolatry,” “Of the Place and Time of Prayer,” and “Of Common Prayer and Sacraments.”

³ Stanza 5, Hymn 5, *Hymns occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8, 1750. Part II* (London, 1750).

⁴ From Stanza 2, Hymn 18, in *Gloria Patri; or, Hymns to the Trinity*, cited from G. Osborn, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868–1872), 3:352; also 7:299. Unless otherwise identified, hymn texts quoted are from *Poetical Works*.

The Father multiplies my peace,
 Jesus doth my faith increase,
 And teaches me to pray;
 The Spirit purifies my heart,
 And makes, me, Saviour, as Thou art,
 And seals me to thy day.⁵

Because the triune God has delivered humanity from the bondage of sin, says Charles in his sermon on 1 Kings 18:21, God certainly “has a just demand to more than we are able to pay.” But in God’s mercy, God graciously accepts “the poor and beggarly oblation of ourselves”—an offering that is possible, in fact, by the generous action of God. Charles observes that “to be admitted to worship his God is doubtless the highest honour wherewith a creature can be blest, and to devote ourselves entirely to his service is only to be secured of our title to this dignity and prominence which the king of heaven and earth allows us.” By exercising God’s gift of worship, notes Charles, the worshipper is multiply blessed, “for even whilst we serve God, we dignify our nature, augment the perfection of our being and partake of his honour and glory.”⁶ Because God is the enabler of worship, God is constantly teaching new ways to offer fitting praise.⁷

Appropriate worship, then, acknowledges the prior activity and beneficence of the three-one God, who is to be exalted “by all in earth and all in heaven” “through all eternity.”⁸ Praise may be offered to the divine Tri-unity, to the three Persons sequentially, or to each Person separately. Charles provides hymnic illustration of each type of doxology, with thanksgiving for the atoning and mediating work of the second Person finding widest expression throughout the various hymn collections. Charles mentions several times in his journal that the Methodists sang a hymn to Christ, and on one occasion he notes that they “assembled before day to sing hymns to Christ as God,” thereby connecting Methodist worship practice with that of the early Christians as identified in Pliny’s letter to the Emperor Trajan.⁹

II. Worship is an obligation and an opportunity

A. *Obligation*

God honors human creatures with the possibility of bestowing worship on their Creator. But Charles, echoing the first article of the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the broader tradition of the Church, indicates that such a possibil-

⁵ Stanzas 1–3, Hymn 7, section on “Hymns and Prayers to the Trinity,” in Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Trinity* (Bristol: William Pine, 1767; repr. Madison, NJ: The Charles Wesley Society, 1998), 92–93.

⁶ Sermon on 1 Kings 18:21, *Sermons*, 120–121.

⁷ Cf. Thomas Jackson, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. (London: John Mason, 1849; repr. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980), 2:216; hereafter cited as *Journal*.

⁸ Hymns 9 and 12, in *Gloria Patri; or, Hymns to the Trinity*, in *Poetical Works*, 3:348–349.

⁹ 25 October 1743, *Journal*, 1:340.

ity is truly not optional, for God has indeed made us *homo adorans*—for the purpose of giving glory. Appropriately, this understanding is spelled out most fully in Charles’s hymnic catechism found in the published *Hymns for Children*:

Meet and right it is that I
Should my Maker glorify;
Born for this alone I am,
God to praise, through Jesu’s name:
Author of my life, receive
Praise the best a child can give.

Teach me, as I older grow,
Thee in Christ aright to know;
That I may Thy blessings prize,
Bring Thee, Jesus, sacrifice,
Thee with understanding praise,
Love, and serve Thee all my days.¹⁰

Because we are made in order to praise, worship is the vocation of a lifetime and a joyful obligation. Hence, the divine directive in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue—that of remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy—ought to be regarded as a delightful duty and a singular occasion among many for the worship of God. A Christian ought to be glad at the prospect of going unto the house of the Lord, and need neither human exhortation nor divine command for motivation.¹¹ Sabbath worship (understood in the Christian dispensation to mean Sunday worship) is to be the minimum, never the maximum, especially in light of the debt that a redeemed humanity owes. The human creature ought to aspire continually after God and “press after intimacy with God”; every day should be a Sabbath “by keeping up [the] heart in a holy frame, and by maintaining a constant communion with God.”¹²

To aid the worshiping creature, says Charles, God has provided certain means whereby grace is received, and the heart and mind are then quickened toward thanksgiving and greater receptivity to the purposes and presence of God. These channels of love, attested in the apostolic witness, are not to be ignored; a person “is no Christian, who is not constant in the means of grace.”¹³ Because this is such a fundamental concept, Charles explains the means of grace in one of his *Hymns for Children* and uses as illustration an idealized description of early Christian praxis:

¹⁰ Hymn 103, *Hymns for Children*, in *Poetical Works*, 6:464. On this theme, see also from the *Hymns for Children*, Hymn 17 (6:386) and Hymn 95 (6:458).

¹¹ Cf. Sermon on Psalm 126:7, *Sermons*, 128–129.

¹² Sermon on John 4:41, *Sermons*, 262.

¹³ Sermon on Luke 18:9–14, *Sermons*, 271.

God of all-alluring grace,
Thee through Jesus Christ we praise,
Father, in Thy Spirit's power,
Thee we for Thy grace adore.

Sent in Jesu's mighty name,
Grace with God from heaven came;
Grace on all mankind bestow'd,
Grace, the life and power of God.

Us, whoe'er the gift receive,
It enables to believe,
Helps our soul's infirmity
Still to live, and die with Thee.

In the means Thou hast enjoin'd
All who seek the grace shall find;
In the prayer, the fast, the word,
In the supper of their Lord.

Thus the saints of ancient days
Waited, and obtain'd Thy grace;
Drank the blood by Jesus shed,
Daily on His body fed.

Thus the whole assembly join'd,
Jesus in the midst to find,
Prayer presenting to the skies,
Morn and evening sacrifice.

Jointly praying, and apart,
Each to Thee pour'd out his heart,
Solemnly Thy grace implored,
Still continued in the word:

Search'd the Scriptures day and night,
(All their comfort and delight
There to catch Thy Spirit's power,)
Heard, and read, and lived them o'er.

Twice a week they fasted then,
Purest of the sons of men,
Choicest vessels of Thy grace,
Patterns to the faithful race.

Still to us they speak, though dead,
Bid us in their footsteps tread,
Bid us never dare remove
From the channels of Thy love.

Never will we hence depart,
 Till our all in all Thou art,
 Till from outward means we fly.
 Till we on Thy bosom die.¹⁴

The person who thinks the means of grace unnecessary is deceived, claims Charles in his sermon on 1 John 3:14: “a man must suppose himself not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles, before he can fancy himself above the use of means. Nay, he must be holier than St. Paul”¹⁵ Indeed, at several points in his journal, Charles records that he pressed the Methodists to exercise the means of grace given to them, particularly public prayer and the sacrament as well as the so-called “desideratum of the Methodists,” worship in the family.¹⁶ Charles’s emphatic stress on the use of the means was not only positively put; it also served as a reaction against the “quietism” or “stillness” advocated by some Moravians who were suspicious of outward expressions of religion, especially those practiced by persons lacking the full assurance of faith. Tensions with the Moravians on this issue during the late 1730s resulted in the departure of the Methodists from the Fetter Lane Society and in brother John writing his significant sermon on the “Means of Grace.” The allure of quietism nevertheless endured, as Charles notes in his journal, for on not a few occasions he was compelled to preach “on the ordinances.”¹⁷

B. Opportunity

Worship not only is an exercise in obedience to the three-one God, it is an opportunity for an encounter and conversation with the divine, whether worship be in one’s closet or in the company of the faithful. God never fails to be present; human obstacles, however, may hinder the worshipper’s perception of God’s nearness. Thus in the corporate assembly where two or three are gathered, the worshipper can know the certainty of God’s presence through the Son by relying upon the scripture promises of Matthew 18:20:

Jesu, we look to Thee,
 Thy promised presence claim!
 Thou in the midst of us shalt be,
 Assembled in Thy name:
 Thy name salvation is,
 Which here we come to prove;
 Thy name is life, and joy, and peace,
 And everlasting love.

...

¹⁴ Hymn 6, *Hymns for Children*, in *Poetical Works*, 6:376–377.

¹⁵ Sermon on 1 John 3:14, *Sermons*, 150.

¹⁶ See esp. 4–30 October 1756, *Journal*, 2:120–137.

¹⁷ 3 October 1756, *Journal*, 2:119. In his journal for 22 April 1740, Charles records, “At Crouch’s Society many were wounded. I left among them the hymn entitled, ‘The Means of Grace,’ which I have printed as an antidote to stillness” (*Journal*, 1:221).

Present we know Thou art;
 But, O, Thyself reveal!
 Now, Lord, let every bounding heart
 The mighty comfort feel!
 O might Thy quickening voice
 The death of sin remove;
 And bid our inmost souls rejoice
 In hope of perfect love!¹⁸

Because Christ has promised to be present at the gathering of the faithful, a person who claims to be a Christian ought to attend. A person may come and not meet the Son of God, says Charles, but a person cannot expect to find him without joining in the fellowship of believers: “they who forbear assembling themselves together are no followers of Christ; they are quite out of his way.”¹⁹ Besides, in the company of the children of God, one’s joy in prayer and in praise and thanksgiving is magnified, and one is built up in faith and united with others in the “glorious hope” of the Christians’ “high calling.”²⁰ Even so, attendance at corporate worship does not make one a Christian, argues Charles. But it does put the person “in God’s way,” so that by grace he or she may respond in faith.²¹

In corporate worship, those gathered are not only the persons visible to the eye, for by the power of the Spirit of God those on earth join with the “general church above” to unite in songs to the Lamb.²² Even those unwillingly absent from the assembly are somehow made mystically present. In a letter to his new wife Sally, Charles offered reassurance that although they were parted by distance, in worship she was nonetheless present to join in praise and prayer:

From six till eight we rejoiced greatly; yet trembled before the Lord. Be sure we did not forget our absent friends. But none of you were absent. Our assembly was made up of the Head and members, even the whole church, militant and triumphant.²³

Particularly at the Lord’s Supper is the union of saints in heaven and on earth perceived, for it is a tangible anticipation of that day when the faithful of all times and places shall feast and sing at the heavenly banquet.²⁴

¹⁸ Stanzas 1 and 3, Hymn 237, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Vol. 2, Part 2, in *Poetical Works*, 5:467–468.

¹⁹ Sermon on John 8:1–11, *Sermons*, 241–242.

²⁰ Sermon on Psalm 126:7, *Sermons*, 128; and Hymn 32 “At meeting of friends,” in *Hymns for those that seek and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus*, in *Poetical Works*, 4:253.

²¹ Sermon on Luke 18:9–14, *Sermons*, 271.

²² See Hymn for “Entering into the Congregation,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), in *Poetical Works*, 2:226; also Hymn 96 in John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (Bristol: Farley, 1745; repr. Madison, NJ: The Charles Wesley Society, 1995).

²³ Letter 26 September 1749?, *Journal*, 2:190.

²⁴ See in particular the section on “the Sacrament as a Pledge of Heaven” in the *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*.

While the worship of the triune God is an end in itself, an opportunity that arises from worship, indicates Charles, is engagement in works of piety and mercy. The model for such a moral counterpart to praise and prayer is the Lord himself who, at the bidding of the Father, engaged in ministry to the poor and the outcast. In a statement reflecting the classical Benedictine dictum of *ora et labora*, Charles wrote in his sermon on John 8:1–11 that Christians should so imitate the life of Christ, that “from prayer they return with their Lord to doing good, from doing good they retire to prayer.”²⁵ Ethical action finds its impetus and inspiration from the worship of God: the service of God is integrally linked with the service of the neighbor. By connecting works with worship in this way, actions of piety and mercy avoid labeling as external manifestations of religion separate from a religion of the heart, and charitable works are identifiable as the outgrowth of faith by grace.

Worship is thus both an obligation and an opportunity, not to be neglected. For those who elect not to engage in frequent communion with God through corporate worship, there are outcomes that affect not only those who absent themselves, but the assembly as well. In his sermon on Psalm 126:7, Charles names four specific consequences for the one who “forbear[s] assembling himself with the people of God”: “he breaks the communion of saints; he renounces the privileges of his baptism; he casts himself out of the congregation of faithful people; and he excommunicates, or cuts himself off from the body of Christ, and that consequently Christ shall profit him nothing.”²⁶ By naming these consequences, the identification of the Church as the Body of Christ is taken seriously: because the body consists of many parts, the absence of a single part dismembers the body (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12–31). For this reason (and others), Charles and most of the Methodist leaders insisted that the Methodists participate regularly in worship at the parish church—even if they were not always made welcome.

III. Worship is offered in spirit and in truth

In a hymn under the heading “the means of grace” published at the height of the stillness controversy, Charles reflected on the employment of those means:

Long have I seem'd to serve Thee, Lord,
With unavailing pain;
Fasted, and pray'd, and read Thy word,
And heard it preach'd, in vain.

Oft did I with the' assembly join,
And near Thine altar drew;
A form of godliness was mine,
The power I never knew.

²⁵ Sermon on John 8:1–11, *Sermons*, 241.

²⁶ Sermon on Psalm 126:7, *Sermons*, 129.

To please Thee thus (at last I see)
 In vain I hoped and strove:
 For what are outward things to Thee,
 Unless they spring from love?²⁷

These stanzas might suggest that Charles was sympathetic to Philip Henry Molther and other Moravians who advocated stillness: that the means of grace should not be employed until the heart had been fully converted. Whatever his personal scruples may have been, since this hymn is undoubtedly autobiographical, Charles's preaching seems to be constant on this matter. While Charles affirmed that it is our "bounden duty" to be "constant in the means of grace," he was also convinced that there was no profit in using a form of godliness that was not accompanied by a deeply-felt love of God.²⁸ He makes clear that the means of grace ought not to be used lightly or wantonly, and neither should they be relied upon as external ends in themselves. Quoting John 4:24 in his sermon on Romans 3:23–25, Charles wrote that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. He requires the heart; a spiritual not a mere literal obedience, the power of godliness not the bare form."²⁹ On those occasions at worship when hearts were intensely warmed and the Lord was perceived to be unmistakably present, Charles would comment in his journal or in his letters that on that day they had truly worshipped God in spirit and in truth.³⁰

Charles does not appear to provide a full description of what he would regard as spirited and truthful worship. But he does account for what would be the opposite: an "artificial devotion [that is] barren and dry, void of zeal and warmth, and drives on heavily in pursuit of God, as Pharaoh when his chariot wheels were taken off."³¹ A warning repeated through many of his sermons is that those practitioners of outward religion—"modern Pharisees" he calls them³²—who boast of their regularity in fasting, their generous tithing, and their attendance at public prayer and sacrament ought to take stock of whether they carry inward marks such as "peace, love, joy in the Holy Ghost" lest they be "an abomination in the sight of God, and an heir of every woe."³³ But Charles never deprecates the forms themselves, only the misuse of them. Not only does he value the so-called "instituted" means of grace, he appreciates the canonical liturgies of the Church of England as vehicles of grace. Even the praying of one of the Church's approved and often-repeated collects could move a soul toward true belief.³⁴ In his journal entry for 28 October 1756, Charles recorded:

²⁷ Stanzas 1–3, Hymn on "The Means of Grace," in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), in *Poetical Works*, 1:233.

²⁸ Sermon on 1 John 3:14, *Sermons*, 136; and sermon on Romans 3:23–25, *Sermons*, 194.

²⁹ Sermon on Romans 3:23–25, *Sermons*, 192.

³⁰ See, for example, the letter to Sally dated 26 September [?], *Journal*, 2:190.

³¹ Sermon on John 4:41, *Sermons*, 267.

³² See, for example, *Journal* for 27 October 1739 and for 23 July 1741, *Journal*, 1:192, 290.

³³ Sermon on Titus 3:8, *Sermons*, 163; and sermon on Ephesians 5:14, *Sermons*, 214.

³⁴ See 14 June 1738, *Journal*, 1:106.

I examined more of the Society. Most of them have known the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: several received it at church; one in the Litany, another in the Lord's Prayer. With that word, 'Thy kingdom come,' Christ came into his heart. To many he has been made known in the breaking of bread.³⁵

Sadly, Charles perceived that the lack of solemnity and seriousness on the part of some clergy created an obstacle to the reception of grace at the church's worship, as when there were "men in surplices talking, laughing, and pointing, as in a play-house, the whole time of service."³⁶ Perhaps this clerical ineptitude and Charles's (and brother John's) often-reiterated caution about "bare forms"—coupled with the emphasis upon worship "in spirit"—caused some Methodists to develop a wariness about the legitimacy of any set forms for worship, a suspicion exacerbated in America by much anti-Anglican sentiment in the years preceding and immediately following the Revolutionary War.

IV. Worship is on the Lord's Day

In keeping with the law of God, Christians keep the Sabbath, now understood to be the first day of the week, for the risen Lord has claimed that day for himself. The day is not principally regarded as a day of rest. Rather, it is the weekly celebration of Christ's resurrection, the beginning of the new creation, when the old starts to yield place to what in the end shall be. The first day in the Genesis chronology, when heaven and earth were made by the eternal triune God, has been overlaid with John of Patmos's revelation of God's new heaven and new earth. The Lord's Day is an *anamnesis* of the victory over the powers of sin and death in which the community of believers participates; before their eyes they see Christ's love displayed and in their bodies they feel the power of his resurrection. Charles lays this out succinctly in his hymn "for the Lord's day":

Come, let us with our Lord arise;
Our Lord, who made both earth and skies;
Who died to save the world He made,
And rose triumphant from the dead:
He rose, the Prince of life and peace,
And stamp'd the day for ever His.

This is the day the Lord hath made,
That all may see His power display'd,
May feel His resurrection's power,
And rise again to fall no more,
In perfect righteousness renew'd,
And fill'd with all the life of God.

³⁵ 28 October 1756, *Journal*, 2:137.

³⁶ 23 August 1744, *Journal*, 1:380.

On Jesus's "consecrated day," honor and praise is to be given to him not in a careless or disorganized fashion, but in a manner that he himself has revealed:

Then let us render Him his own,
 With solemn prayer approach the throne;
 With meekness hear the gospel word,
 With thanks His dying love record;
 Our joyful hearts and voices raise,
 And fill His courts with songs of praise.

Honour and praise to Jesus pay,
 Throughout His consecrated day;
 Be all in Jesu's praise employ'd,
 Nor leave a single moment void;
 With utmost care the time improve,
 And only breathe His praise and love.³⁷

Charles here mentions three principal components of Lord's Day worship all "given" by the Lord himself, practiced by the church from antiquity, and recognized as means of grace: "with solemn prayer approach the throne"; "with meekness hear the gospel-word"; "with thanks his dying love record." Prayer, whether it is confession, supplication or intercession, whether it is personal or corporate, is made to the Father through the Son, who unites our prayers with his to plead for pardon and blessing.³⁸ Prayer can be a source of pain and of comfort; Charles accounts for both in his poetry and in his own experience. The "gospel-word" is heard by various methods: the reading of scripture, preaching—what Charles identifies as a "sacrament" when the Lord is mightily present,³⁹ prayers, and songs. A true hearing of the holy writ can breathe new life into a weary soul and provide encouragement or comfort, but it can also invite and convict. "The Scripture comes with double weight to me in a church," Charles confided to his journal.⁴⁰ The thanks—*eucharistia*—for Christ's dying love Charles expected to give each Lord's Day, and he trusted that the always-present Lord would visit the faithful in a special way at the holy supper to provide pardon, peace and comfort. At a Thursday Eucharist he observed:

Before communicating, I left it to Christ, whether, or in what measure, he would please to manifest himself to me, in this breaking of bread. I had no particular attention to the prayers: but in the prayer of consecration I saw, by the eye of faith, or rather, had a glimpse of, Christ's broken, mangled body, as taking down from the cross. Still I could not observe the prayer, but only repeat with tears, "O love,

³⁷ Hymn 61, *Hymns for Children*, in *Poetical Works*, 6:429–430.

³⁸ For a poetic expression of the Son's mediation in prayer, see stanzas 4 and 5 of Hymn 21, *Hymns for Children*, in *Poetical Works*, 6:390.

³⁹ See 29 June 1750, *Journal*, 2:73.

⁴⁰ 24 October 1756, *Journal*, 2:133. See also the comments for 24 June 1739, 17 July 1741, 27 July 1743, and 15 October 1756, *Journal*, 1:155, 288–289, 328–329; 2:126.

love! At the same time, I felt great peace and joy; and assurance of feeling more, when it is best.”⁴¹

Although Charles apparently never used the phrase “converting ordinance” in reference to the holy meal, he did recognize its power:

I gave her the sacrament, which she had never received before; but was taught to desire it by the Spirit that was in her, even as soon as she had received him. I asked what difference she found *after* communicating. She answered, that she saw God and was full of him before; but in the act of receiving, she had the brightness of his presence, and was filled, as it were, with all the fulness of God.⁴²

Solemn prayer, the hearing of the good news, and Holy Communion gladden the heart; and so Charles adds a fourth—and musical—component to his list: “our joyful hearts and voices raise, / and fill his courts with songs of praise.”

For Charles, a “true” Lord’s Day was a day devoted entirely and tirelessly to the service of God. Whitsunday of 1746 was exemplary:

We had asked in prayer last night a double blessing for this day; and the answer came. I rejoiced from four to six. The second time I preached in the wood. In the sacrament the skies poured down righteousness. Mr. Hodges read prayers at Conham. I preached a fourth time to a quiet multitude at the Mills; and then exhorted the Society to walk worthy of their holy calling. This might properly be called the Lord’s day.⁴³

V. Conclusion

If what has been presented here is an accurate assessment of Charles Wesley’s theology of worship, it is clear that he really has not offered anything new in the arena of liturgical thought. This should not be surprising since Charles, like his brother John, was emphatic that Methodists should look no different than other “real” Christians; they should simply be faithful, apostolic, scriptural Christians.⁴⁴ What Charles did do was to urge long-time communicants of the Church of England to be faithful to that which had already been passed down and to recover the spiritual aspects of the liturgical tradition that was set before them. Forms were not the problem, but spiritual amnesia and anorexia were. It may still be the case today.

⁴¹ 25 May 1738, *Journal*, 1:95–96.

⁴² 9 August 1741, *Journal*, 1:293.

⁴³ 18 May 1746, *Journal*, 1:414.

⁴⁴ John Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 32–42.